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The Pronunciation of Modern Icelandic

A Brief Course for Foreign Students

Accompanied by exercises designed
for use in a language laboratory

Málvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands
Reykjavík

The Pronunciation of Modern Icelandic

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Bók þessa má ekki afrita með
neinum hætti, svo sem ljósmyndun,
prentun, hljóðritun eða á annan
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Preface

This material is meant for use in the *Aðfaranám* in *Íslenska fyrir erlenda stúdenta* in *Heimspekideild Háskóla Íslands*. The purpose is that it may serve as an introduction for foreign students to the pronunciation of Modern Icelandic.

It should be clear from the start that this material does not give a detailed account of all problems nor is it intended to be a complete phonetic description.

I have tried to focus on the features of pronunciation that experience has shown to be problematic for foreigners (there is a „survey of problems" in chapter 6.2). Moreover, I have tried to look at the problems from the standpoint of the spelling of the written language, which is presumably the standpoint from which the students of this course approach the study of Icelandic.

I have chosen to concentrate on the language of Reykjavík and neighbouring areas as this can be seen as a common language of most Icelanders. Dialectal differences are discussed in the *Appendix*.

My suggestion is that students carefully read the discussion of each problem and, following the phonetic transcription, practice the examples or exercises before class. In that way, students can make better use of their time in the language laboratory, concentrating on repetition of words and sentences.

In the language laboratory, it is suggested that students go through four stages in each exercise (at least in the beginning, when you are less advanced): 1) listen carefully to the native speaker; 2) practice; 3) listen again and compare to the native voice; 4) practice again.

It may be a good idea to use Exercise 52 in 6.1 as an introduction. It is also probably not a bad idea to do Exercise 21 in 4.2 before chapter 2 has been finished.

1. A few words on the phonetic symbols used

1.1 „̥" means „voiceless"

The little circle, ̥ , indicates that a sound is voiceless. Thus, for instance, [n̥] like in *vanta* [van̥ta] is produced the same way as [n] in *vanda* [vanta] except that the [n̥] (in *vanta*) is voiceless whereas [n] (in *vanda*) is voiced, etc. (The terms „voiced" and „unvoiced" are discussed in 2.2.3).

1.2 „:" means „long"

When a sound is long, it is followed by the symbol :. All other sounds are short. Thus the only long sound in the word *net* [nɛ:t] is the [ɛ], and all the sounds in the word *hestur* [hɛstʏr] are short, etc. See 3.2.1.

1.3 Used here = I P A 's

[k_j] = [c]
[k_j^h] = [c^h]
[j̊] = [ç]
[þ] = [θ]
[ɪ] = [e]
[ʏ] = [ø]
[ö] = [œ]

In some respects our phonetic transcription deviates from that of the so-called IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet). In most cases the purpose is to make the transcription look more like the normal spelling.

Thus, we have [k_j] and [k_j^h] for IPA's [c] and [c^h], respectively (please note that [k_j] indicates one single sound, not two, and so does [k_j^h]).

Furthermore, we use [j̊] instead of [ç] for the voiceless counterpart of [j].

We use [þ] instead of [θ], [ɪ] instead of [e], and [ö] instead of [œ].

Finally, we use [ʏ] as a symbol for the sound represented in the Icelandic orthography by the letter *u* (instead of IPA's [ø]). This is done in accordance with the traditional Icelandic phonetic transcription.

(It may be added here that many books on Icelandic phonetics use the symbols [b̥], [d̥], [ɟ̊], and [g̊] for the lax stops. Their phonetic value is exactly the same as in our [p], [t], [k_j], and [k], respectively).

2. Letters and pronunciation

2.1 Vowels

2.1.1

Letter	*Pronunciation*			*As in*		
	Most often	Occurring variants				
í	[i]			*bíddu*	[pit:ʏ]	(„(please) wait“)
ý	[i]			*sýndu*	[sintu]	(„(please) show“)
i	[ɪ]	[i]	(_ng,_nk, _gi)	*listi*	[lɪstɪ]	(„list“)
y	[ɪ]	[i]	(_ng,_nk, _gi)	*synda*	[sɪnta]	(„swim“)
e	[ɛ]	[ɛi]	(_ng,_nk, _gi,_gj)	*senda*	[sɛnta]	(„send“)
é	[jɛ]			*sést*	[sjɛst]	(„can be seen“)
u	[ʏ]	[u] [ʏi]	(_ng,_nk) (_gi)	*hundur*	[hʏntʏr]	(„dog“)
ö	[ö]	[öy]	(_ng,_nk, _gi)	*hönd*	[hönt]	(„hand“)
ú	[u]			*Rússi*	[rus:ɪ]	(„a Russian“)
o	[ɔ]	[ɔi]	(_gi)	*loft*	[lɔft]	(„air“)
a	[a]	[au] [ai]	(_ng,_nk) (_gi)	*sandur*	[santʏr]	(„sand“)
ei	[ɛi]			*neisti*	[nɛistɪ]	(„spark“)
ey	[ɛi]			*heyrðu*	[hɛirðʏ]	(„(please) listen“)
au	[öy]			*haust*	[höyst]	(„autumn“)
ó	[ou]			*bóndi*	[pountɪ]	(„farmer“)
æ	[ai]			*læst*	[laist]	(„locked“)
á	[au]			*ást*	[aust]	(„love“)

NB I

_i_ — _í_, _a_ — _á_ etc. differ in quality

Note that *i* and *í*, *a* and *á* etc. have **different quality** ([ɪ] and [i], [a] and [au], respectively, etc.), i.e. the superscript mark, ’ , like in *á, í, é, ó, ú, ý*, is **not** a symbol of **length**, **accent** or anything of that sort.

NB II

Vowels can be short or long

All vowels can be either short or long (depending on the following consonantism, see 3.2.2). Thus, we have [i:] (long) in *bíða* [pi:ða] („to wait“) but [i] (short) in *bíddu* [pit:ʏ] („(please) wait“) etc.

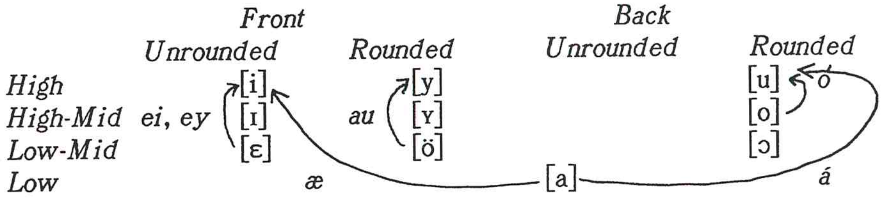
2.1.2

In order to get a better idea of the production of the vowels, both monophthongs and diphthongs, they can be shown in the following manner (if the terminology causes any problems, ask the teacher!):

1) *monophthongs (eight sounds)*

	Front		Back	
	Unrounded	*Rounded*	*Unrounded*	*Rounded*
High	*í, ý* = [i]			*ú* = [u]
High-Mid	*i, y* = [ɪ]	*u* = [ʏ]		
Low-Mid	*e* = [ɛ]	*ö* = [ö]		*o* = [ɔ]
Low			*a* = [a]	

2) *diphthongs (five sounds)*



The arrows show how the diphthongs [ɛi], [öy], [ou], [ai] and [au] are produced, which can be seen simply as „adding one vowel to another".

NB III

í and *ý* = [i]
i and *y* = [ɪ]
ei and *ey* = [ɛi]

Note that the letters *i* and *y* represent the same sound, [ɪ]; *í* and *ý* both represent [i] ; *ei* and *ey* both represent [ɛi].

NB IV

Note the difference between the following sounds: *í*, *ý* = [i]; *i*, *y* = [ɪ]; and *e* = [ɛ].

Many foreign students have difficulties in distinguishing between those three.

Exercise 1

a) („mouth opens gradually") — read first horizontally, then vertically

fýl	[fi:l]	*lím*	[li:m]	*býð*	[pi:ð]
fyl	[fɪ:l]	*lim*	[lɪ:m]	*bið*	[pɪ:ð]
fel	[fɛ:l]	*lem*	[lɛ:m]	*beð*	[pɛ:ð]

býst	[pist]	*líst*	[list]	*rífst*	[rifst]
hist	[hɪst]	*list*	[lɪst]	*fyrst*	[fɪst]
hest	[hɛst]	*lest*	[lɛst]]	*fremst*	[frɛmst]

b) („mouth closes gradually")

set	[sɛ:t]	*ber*	[pɛ:r]	*net*	[nɛ:t]
sit	[sɪ:t]	*vil*	[vɪ:l]	*byl*	[pɪ:l]
flýt	[fli:t]	*Níl*	[ni:l]	*Krít*	[kʰri:t]

leggur	[lɛk:ʏr]	*heldur*	[hɛltʏr]	*festa*	[fɛsta]
liggur	[lɪk:ʏr]	*hirðir*	[hɪrðɪr]	*kyssa*	[k_jʰɪs:a]
límdur	[limtʏr]	*hýddur*	[hit:ʏr]	*bíddu*	[pit:ʏ]

NB V

Most foreign students find the sounds *u* = [ʏ], *ö* = [ö] and *au* = [öy] hard to pronounce and to distinguish. Pay special attention to them from the beginning.

Exercise 2

gul	[kʏ:l]	*fura*	[fʏ:ra]	*sumar*	[sʏ:mar]
söl	[sö:l]	*flötur*	[flö:tʏr]	*sögur*	[sö:ɣʏr]
rauð	[röy:ð]	*sauður*	[söy:ðʏr]	*laumast*	[löy:mast]

fundur	[fʏntʏr]	*hurð*	[hʏrð]	*suddi*	[sʏt:ɪ]
lönd	[lönt]	*Hörður*	[hörðʏr]	*Sölvi*	[sölvɪ]
haust	[höyst]	*saurga*	[söyrka]	*nauðga*	[nöyðka]

NB VI

Diphthongs can be either long or short

Note that the diphthongs (*ei, ey, au, ó, æ, á*) can, like other vowels, be either long **or short** (depending on the following consonantism, see 3.2.2). Many foreign students have had difficulties in pronouncing the short ones, so let us practice this a bit (make sure you produce both parts of each diphthong):

Exercise 3

a) *long vs. short diphthongs*

LONG		SHORT	
feitur	[fɛi:tʏr]	*neisti*	[nɛistɪ]
keyra	[kⱼʰɛi:ra]	*reynsla*	[rɛinstla]
laug	[löy:ɣ]	*braust*	[pröyst]
stór	[stou:r]	*fólska*	[foulska]
læti	[lai:tɪ]	*næst*	[naist]
kátur	[kʰau:tʏr]	*ást*	[aust]

b) *short diphthongs*

ei, ey	*seinn*	[sɛitn],	*keyrsla*	[kⱼʰɛir̥stla],	*heyrðu*	[hɛirðʏ]
au	*fauskur*	[föyskʏr],	*laust*	[löyst],	*rausn*	[röystn]
ó	*stóll*	[stoutl],	*ólga*	[oulka],	*hólf*	[houlv]
æ	*stærst*	[staist],	*hræddur*	[r̥ait:ʏr],	*lægst*	[laixst]
á	*nást*	[naust],	*fálma*	[faulma],	*sársauki*	[saur̥söykⱼɪ]

NB VII

borðunum = „borðonum“ etc.

In dat.plur.def. of nouns, like *borðunum* (from *borð* „table“), *konunum* (from *kona* „woman“), and *hestunum* (from *hestur* „horse“), the first *u* of *-unum* **is usually often pronounced as an** *o*.

2.1.3 Vowel exercises

Exercise 4 — long vowels —

lína	[li:na]	*súr*	[su:r]
nýra	[ni:ra]	*bor*	[pɔ:r]
fita	[fɪ:ta]	*eyra*	[ɛi:ra]
mysa	[mɪ:sa]	*leita*	[lɛi:ta]
fer	[fɛ:r]	*færa*	[fai:ra]
gul	[kʏ:l]	*staur*	[stöy:r]
gröf	[krö:v]	*náð*	[nau:ð]
haf	[ha:v]	*skór*	[skou:r]

Exercise 5 — short vowels —

tísta	[tʰista]	*kústur*	[kʰustʏr]
býsna	[pistna]	*borga*	[pɔrka]
rifna	[rɪpna]	*neysla*	[nɛistla]
frysta	[frɪsta]	*greindur*	[krɛintʏr]
gestur	[kⱼɛstʏr]	*sæng*	[saiŋk]
Gunnar	[kʏn:ar]	*spaugsamur*	[spöyxsamʏr]
bölva	[pölva]	*dást*	[taust]
Baldur	[paltʏr]	*bólga*	[poulka]

Exercise 6 — simple sentences —

Lína finnur ber [li:na fɪn:ʏr pɛ:r]	(„Lína finds berries“)
Símon lemur mig [si:mɔn lɛ:mʏrmɪɣ]	(„Símon beats me“)
Sýndu mér pennann [sintʏmjɛr pʰɛn:an]	(„Show me the pen“)
Gunnar þarf föt [kʏn:ar þarv fö:t]	(„Gunnar needs some clothes“)
Sigga saumar buxur [sɪk:a söy:mar pʏxsʏr]	(„Sigga sews trousers“)
Mjólkin er súr [mjoul̥kⱼɪnɛr su:r]	(„The milk is sour“)
Ég málaði stólinn [jɛ:ɣ mau:laðɪ stou:lɪn]	(„I painted the chair“)
Hún kom í strætó [huŋkʰɔmi strai:tou]	(„She came on a bus“)

Þau eru bæði heima [þöy:ɛrʏ pai:ðɪ hɛi:ma]	(„They are both at home“)
Þarna býr gömul kona [þatnapir kö:mʏl kʰɔ:na]	(„An old lady lives there“)

2.2 Consonants

2.2.1

Letter		*Pronunciation*	*As in*		
p		[pʰ]	*penni*	[pʰɛn:ɪ]	(„pen“)
		[p]	*tapa*	[tʰa:pa]	(„lose“)
		[f]	*skipta*	[skⱼɪfta]	(„divide“)
t		[tʰ]	*taska*	[tʰaska]	(„hand-bag“)
		[t]	*láta*	[lau:ta]	(„let“)
k		[kⱼʰ]	*kista*	[kⱼʰɪsta]	(„coffin“)
		[kʰ]	*kasta*	[kʰasta]	(„throw“)
		[kⱼ]	*poki*	[pʰɔ:kⱼɪ]	(„bag“)
		[k]	*taka*	[tʰa:ka]	(„take“)
		[x]	*rakt*	[raxt]	(„damp“ neutr.)
b		[p]	*bær*	[pai:r]	(„town“)
d		[t]	*dalur*	[ta:lʏr]	(„valley“)
g		[kⱼ]	*gítar*	[kⱼi:tar]	(„guitar“)
		[k]	*gat*	[ka:t]	(„hole“)
		[x]	*hægt*	[haixt]	(„possible“)
		[ɣ]	*saga*	[sa:ɣa]	(„story“)
		[j]	*lygi*	[li:jɪ]	(„a lie“)
v		[v]	*vasi*	[va:sɪ]	(„pocket“)
f		[f]	*fá*	[fau:]	(„get“)
		[v]	*lifa*	[lɪ:va]	(„live“)
		[p]	*sofna*	[sɔpna]	(„fall asleep“)
	fn(+d)	[m]	*hefnd*	[hɛmt]	(„revenge“)
	fn(+t)	[m̥]	*nefnt*	[nɛm̥t]	(„called“ neutr.)
ð		[ð]	*úða*	[u:ða]	(„spray“)
		[þ]	*iðka*	[ɪþka]	(„practice“)
þ		[þ]	*þurfa*	[þʏrva]	(„need“)
s		[s]	*sól*	[sou:l]	(„sun“)
j		[j]	*já*	[jau:]	(„yes“)
	hj	[j̊]	*hjón*	[j̊ou:n]	(„couple“)
h		[h]	*hundur*	[hʏntʏr]	(„dog“)
		[kʰ]	*hvað*	[kʰva:ð]	(„what“)
	hj	[j̊]	*hjón*	[j̊ou:n]	(„couple“)
	hé	[j̊ɛ]	*hér*	[j̊ɛ:r]	(„here“)
	hr	[r̥]	*hrópa*	[r̥ou:pa]	(„yell“)
	hl	[l̥]	*hlusta*	[l̥ʏsta]	(„listen“)
	hn	[n̥]	*hnútur*	[n̥u:tʏr]	(„knot“)
x		[xs]	*vaxa*	[vaxsa]	(„grow“)
n		[n]	*nú*	[nu:]	(„now“)
		[n̥]	*vanta*	[van̥ta]	(„need“)
		[ɲ]	*enginn*	[ɛiɲkⱼɪn]	(„nobody“)
		[ɲ̊]	*banki*	[pauɲ̊kⱼɪ]	(„bank“)
		[ŋ]	*fingur*	[fiŋkʏr]	(„finger“)
		[ŋ̊]	*banka*	[pauŋ̊ka]	(„knock“)
m		[m]	*mús*	[mu:s]	(„mouse“)
		[m̥]	*lampi*	[lam̥pɪ]	(„lamp“)
l		[l]	*lás*	[lau:s]	(„lock“)
		[l̥]	*sulta*	[sʏl̥ta]	(„jam“)
r		[r]	*rós*	[rou:s]	(„rose“)
		[r̥]	*orka*	[ɔr̥ka]	(„energy“)

NB VIII

The word *guð* („God“) is pronounced as if it were spelled „*gvuð*“: [kvʏːð], i.e. with an inserted *v*. Subsequently, this happens also in all words derived from *guð*, like *guðsþjónusta* („mass“) etc. and proper names like *Guðrún*, *Guðmundur* etc.

NB IX

c = s, k
q = k
w = v
z = s

The letters *c*, *q*, *w* and *z* are left out in the list above as they are not a part of the official spelling system. These letters do, however, sometimes occur in the written language, *c*, *q* and *w* only in foreign words, though.

c is usually pronounced as an *s*, as in *celsíus* [sɛlsiʏs], but sometimes as a *k*, as in *Cortina* [k^hɔr̥tina].

q is pronounced like a *k*, as in *questor* [k^hvɛstɔr].

w is pronounced as a *v*, as in *Winston* [vɪnstɔn].

z was a part of the official orthography until quite recently when its use was abolished. Therefore, a lot of the written material you may come across is likely to contain *z*. In all cases the pronunciation is the same as for *s*; *bezt* [pɛst] („best“).

2.2.2

In order to get a better idea of the articulation of the consonants they can be shown in the following manner (the terms voiced, unvoiced, aspirated and unaspirated are discussed in 2.2.3, for other terminology problems, check handbooks or ask the teacher).

manner of articulation	*place of articulation*						
	lips	*teeth/ lips*	*teeth*	*alveoli*	*palatum*	*velum*	*glottis*
stops							
aspirated	p^h			t^h	k_j^h	k^h	
unaspirated	p			t	k_j	k	
fricatives							
voiced		v	ð		j	ɣ	
unvoiced		f	þ	s	j̊	x	h
nasals							
voiced	m			n	ɲ	ŋ	
unvoiced	m̥			n̥	ɲ̊	ŋ̊	
laterals							
voiced				l			
unvoiced				l̥			
trills							
voiced				r			
unvoiced				r̥			

NB X

b, d, g are unvoiced

Note that **all stops** in Icelandic are **unvoiced**, i.e. *b*, *d* and *g* are never voiced as they are in English, French and many other languages. This feature has subsequently caused some problems for many foreigners, so let us practice this a little:

Exercise 7

[p]	*bær*	[pai:r]	[kⱼ]	*gestur*	[kⱼɛstʏr]
	lambið	[lampɪð]		*lengi*	[lɛiɲkⱼɪ]
	tapa	[tʰa:pa]		*leki*	[lɛ:kⱼɪ]
[t]	*dós*	[tou:s]	[k]	*gata*	[ka:ta]
	aldur	[altʏr]		*anga*	[auŋka]
	hata	[ha:ta]		*loka*	[lɔ:ka]

NB XI

kí — kú
gí — gú

The palatal stops, [kⱼʰ] and [kⱼ], have proved to be difficult for many students. Therefore, it is necessary from the beginning to take good notice of the difference between them on the one hand and the velar stops, [kʰ] and [k], on the other.

This difference is comparable to that between *í* [i] and *ú* [u].

In [i], [kⱼʰ] and [kⱼ] the tongue is in the *front*, in [u], [kʰ] and [k] the tongue is in the *back* of the mouth.

Exercise 8

a) [kⱼʰ] vs. [kʰ]

Compare the following:

kí [kⱼʰi:] (palatal) and *kú* [kʰu:] (velar).

Say *kí* four times, and then *kú* four times. Then say: *kí-kú* , *kí-kú*, *kí-kú*, *kí-kú*.

b) [kⱼ] vs. [k]

Compare the following:

gí [kⱼi:] (palatal) and *gú* [ku:] (velar).

Say *gí* four times, and then *gú* four times. Then say: *gí-gú*, *gí-gú*, *gí-gú*, *gí-gú*.

c)	*Gísli*	[kⱼistlɪ]	*gær*	[kⱼai:r]
	góður	[kou:ðʏr]	*gá*	[kau:]
	giska	[kⱼɪska]	*Gylfi*	[kⱼɪlvɪ]
	gaman	[ka:man]	*Gunnar*	[kʏn:ar]
	kinn	[kⱼʰɪn:]	*kenna*	[kⱼʰɛn:a]
	kaldur	[kʰaltʏr]	*kunna*	[kʰʏn:a]
	kyssa	[kⱼʰɪs:a]	*kyrrð*	[kⱼʰɪrð]
	kona	[kʰɔ:na]	*kostur*	[kʰɔstʏr]

See chapter 5.2 for the distribution of palatals and velars.

NB XII

The *g* of *saga* etc. = [ɣ]

Many foreign students have difficulties in correctly producing the voiced velar fricative [ɣ] as in words like

lag	[la:ɣ]	(„tune“)
dagur	[ta:ɣʏr]	(„day“)
saga	[sa:ɣa]	(„story“)
etc.		

To make things worse, this is not a very „loud“ sound, and consequently it often takes trained ears to distinguish it in fast speech. Furthermore, this [ɣ] can be dropped word-finally in a few very common words, including *og* [ɔ:ɣ] or [ɔ:] („and“) and *ég* [jɛ:ɣ] or [jɛ:] („I“).

Pay good attention to [ɣ] from the start (cf. also chapter 5.9).

Exercise 9

lag	[la:ɣ]	*flögra*	[flöɣra]	*fluga*	[flʏ:ɣa]
dagur	[ta:ɣʏr]	*lagði*	[laɣðɪ]	*hagur*	[ha:ɣʏr]
saga	[sa:ɣa]	*byggði*	[pɪɣðɪ]	*fallegur*	[fatlɛɣʏr]
tog	[tʰɔ:ɣ]	*nægði*	[naiɣðɪ]	*digur*	[tɪ:ɣʏr]
sigra	[sɪɣra]	*tryggði*	[tʰrɪɣðɪ]	*naga*	[na:ɣa]

2.2.3 Consonants as pairs

Twenty-eight consonants (i.e. all consonants except [h] and [s]) can be seen as fourteen „pairs“. Most of you will probably be familiar with at least one sound in most of these „pairs“ from your mother tongues or other languages. Therefore, by looking at the distinction between voiced and unvoiced sounds, and the distinction between aspirated and unaspirated sounds it should be possible to pronounce most Icelandic consonants correctly.

(Thus, for instance, a German who is familiar with the sound [x], as in *Dach*, can produce the sound [ɣ] by „voicing the sound [x]“. English speakers could in a similar way learn to say [p] (unvoiced) by producing the sound [pʰ] (which they are acquainted with from the English word *pin*, etc.) but „leaving out“ most of the air-stream that follows the release of the closure.)

stops

The stops can be looked at as the following four pairs:

pʰ - p
tʰ - t
kⱼʰ - kⱼ
kʰ - k

The only difference is that [pʰ], [tʰ], [kⱼʰ] and [kʰ] are **aspirated**, i.e. after the release of the closure in the stop, the air thrusts out of the mouth with a good deal of pressure.

In [p], [t], [kⱼ] and [k], on the other hand, the airstream following the release is so little that you hardly notice it.

Exercise 10

panna	[pʰan:a]	*prestur*	[pʰrɛstʏr]
banna	[pan:a]	*brotinn*	[prɔ:tɪn]
tala	[tʰa:la]	*taska*	[tʰaska]
dala	[ta:la]	*dýfa*	[ti:va]
keyra	[kⱼʰɛi:ra]	*kjósa*	[kⱼʰou:sa]
Geiri	[kⱼɛi:rɪ]	*geta*	[kⱼɛ:ta]
kaldur	[kʰaltʏr]	*kunna*	[kʰʏn:a]
galdur	[kaltʏr]	*gaffall*	[kaf:atl]

fricatives, nasals, laterals and trills

In fricatives, nasals, laterals and trills we can see the following ten „pairs“:

v — f ; m — m̥
ð — þ ; n — n̥ ; l — l̥ ; r — r̥
j — j̊ ; ɲ — ɲ̊
ɣ — x ; ŋ — ŋ̊

The only difference is that v, ð, j, ɣ, m, n, ɲ, ŋ, l and r are **voiced** whereas f, þ, j̊, x, m̥, n̥, ɲ̊, ŋ̊, l̥ and r̥ are not.

In voiced sounds the vocal chords vibrate during the articulation. This can be felt by placing a finger on the larynx („the Adam's apple“) and pronouncing, for instance, [v]. Now we feel subtle vibrations in the throat.

Another property of voiced sounds is that you can sing them (or hum, rather!). Everyone has heard a hum like *m-m-m*.

In the unvoiced sounds, there are no vibrations in the throat, nor can you hum unvoiced sounds.

NB XIII

The above mentioned **unvoiced** sounds have proved difficult for many foreign students because many (or most, even) of them do not exist in the neighbouring languages.

Pay special attention to the unvoiced sounds in *Exercise 11* below (cf. also chapters 5.5 and 5.4).

Exercise 11

vá	[vau:]	*afar*	[a:var]
fá	[fau:]	*ofsi*	[ɔfsɪ]
iða	[ɪ:ða]	*eða*	[ɛ:ða]
íþrótt	[i:þrouht]	*þrá*	[þrau:]
Jón	[jou:n]	*já*	[jau:]
hjón	[j̊ou:n]	*hérna*	[j̊ɛ(r)tna]
saga	[sa:ɣa]	*magur*	[ma:ɣʏr]
sagt	[saxt]	*fikt*	[fɪxt]
dimmdi	[tɪmtɪ]	*sem*	[sɛ:m]

dimmt	[tɪm̥t]	*samt*	[sam̥t]
syndi	[sɪntɪ]	*hinir*	[hɪ:nɪr]
synti	[sɪn̥tɪ]	*vanta*	[van̥ta]
banginn	[pauɲkⱼɪn]	*lengi*	[lɛiɲkⱼɪ]
bankinn	[pauɲ̊kⱼɪn]	*Sveinki*	[svɛiɲ̊kⱼɪ]
bunga	[puŋka]	*langa*	[lauŋka]
hankar	[hauŋ̊kar]	*banka*	[pauŋ̊ka]
eldur	[ɛltʏr]	*alveg*	[alvɛɣ]
eltur	[ɛl̥tʏr]	*allt*	[al̥t]
verja	[vɛrja]	*ræða*	[rai:ða]
jurt	[jʏr̥t]	*hræða*	[r̥ai:ða]

NB XIV

When clusters of **three** (or even more) consonants occur, as in *æskti*, *lengd*, etc., you will notice a common tendency to **drop one** of the consonants, usually either the first or the second one. Thus, in the following examples, we only pronounce two consonants instead of the written three consonants. We shall not, however, look at this as a perfect „rule" (because there are exceptions from it which we will not go into), but as a „tendency".

Examples:	*sigldi*	[sɪltɪ]	*fylgdi*	[fɪltɪ]
	æskti	[aistɪ]	*fylkti*	[fil̥tɪ]
	barns	[par̥s]	*prests*	[pʰrɛs:]
	lengd	[lɛiŋt]	*rigndi*	[rɪŋtɪ]
	nefnd	[nɛmt]	*nefndi*	[nɛmtɪ]
	efldi	[ɛltɪ]	*álft*	[aul̥t]

2.2.4 Consonant exercises

Exercise 12

penni	[pʰɛn:ɪ]	*sósa*	[sou:sa]	*argur*	[arkʏr]
blóta	[plou:ta]	*nál*	[nau:l]	*kvarta*	[kʰvar̥ta]
maður	[ma:ðʏr]	*hnýta*	[n̥i:ta]	*kjöt*	[kⱼʰö:t]
hempa	[hɛm̥pa]	*enginn*	[ɛiɲkⱼɪn]	*gæta*	[kⱼai:ta]
afi	[a:vɪ]	*hanki*	[hauɲ̊kⱼɪ]	*júlí*	[ju:li]
oft	[ɔft]	*rangur*	[rauŋkʏr]	*hjá*	[j̊au:]
þýða	[þi:ða]	*sanka*	[sauŋ̊ka]	*Kalli*	[kʰal:ɪ]
tún	[tʰu:n]	*lófi*	[lou:vɪ]	*gras*	[kra:s]
diskur	[tɪskʏr]	*hlæja*	[l̥ai:ja]	*naga*	[na:ɣa]
				hiksti	[hɪxstɪ]

Exercise 13 (long (double) consonants)

lubbi	[lʏp:ɪ]	*oddur*	[ɔt:ʏr]
Raggi	[rakⱼ:ɪ]	*Sigga*	[sɪk:a]
töffari	[tʰöf:arɪ]	*kyssa*	[kⱼʰɪs:a]
rúlla	[rul:a]	*lumma*	[lʏm:a]
sinna	[sɪn:a]	*pirraður*	[pʰɪr:aðʏr]

Exercise 14 (simple sentences)

Óskar kemur bráðum [ouskar kⱼʰɛ:mʏr prau:ðʏm]	(„Óskar is coming soon")
Vegurinn var lagaður [vɛ:ɣʏrɪnvar la:ɣaðʏr]	(„The road was improved")
Svar þeirra er rangt [svarðɛirɛr rauŋ̊t]	(„Their answer is wrong")
Stelpan kyssti strákinn [stɛl̥pan kⱼʰɪstɪ strau:kⱼɪn]	(„The girl kissed the boy")
Ertu með höfuðverk? [ɛr̥tʏmɛð hö:vʏðvɛr̥k]	(„Do you have a headache?")
Hnátan óx hratt [n̥au:tan ouxs r̥aht]	(„The little girl grew rapidly")
Siggi byggði stórt hús [sɪkⱼ:ɪ pɪɣðɪ stour̥t hu:s]	(„Siggi built a big house")
Bráðum verður orðið dimmt úti [prau:ðʏm vɛrðʏr ɔrðɪð tɪm̥t u:tɪ]	(„Soon it will be dark outside")
Jón er aldrei heima [jou:nɛr altrɛi hɛi:ma]	(„Jón is never at home")
Henni líkar vel við þig [hɛn:ɪlikar velvɪðɪɣ]	(„She likes you")

3. Stress and length

3.1 Stress

A simplified version of the main rule can go like this:

In Icelandic the first syllable of a word is stressed,
but the other syllables in the word are not

Examples:	*ˈtal*	(„speech“)	*ˈborð*	(„table“)
	ˈskóli	(„school“)	*ˈstofa*	(„living room“)
	ˈdýfinǵar	(„diving“)	*ˈkennari*	(„teacher“)
	ˈkastalarnir	(„the castles“)	*ˈbanöṇunum*	(„the bananas“ d.pl.)

When two or more words form a **compound word**, which is very often the case in Icelandic, the compound word gets main stress on its first syllable, according to the main rule above. Furthermore, it gets **secondary (weaker) stress** on the **first syllable** of the latter (or third, fourth, etc.) part of the compound.

Examples:	*ˈskóli*	+ *ˈstofa*	= *ˈskólaˌstofa*	(„classroom“)
	ˈdýfinǵar	+ *ˈkennari*	= *ˈdýfinǵaˌkennari*	(„diving-teacher“)

This is, however, usually not the case when the first part of such compounds is only one syllable. In those cases, only the main rule is valid.

Examples:	*ˈborð*	+ *ˈstofa*	= *ˈborðstofa*	(„dining-room“)
	ˈtal	+ *ˈkennari*	= *ˈtalkennari*	(„teacher of speech“)

3.2 Length

3.2.1

NB I

(Cf. 1.2). In phonetic transcription, long sounds are indicated by the symbol : immediately following the sound in question. Short sounds have no such indication. Thus, in *saǵa* [sa:ɣa], the first *a* is long, but other sounds in the word are short. In *rabba* [rap:a], the *bb* is long, while other sounds are short, etc.

In **syllables without stress** (i.e. all syllables except the first one, unless the word has secondary stress, see 3.1) **all sounds are short.**

Examples:	*ˈdýfinǵar*	[ti:viŋkar]	(„diving“)
	ˈstofa	[stɔ:va]	(„living room“)
	etc.		

In **stressed syllables** (see 3.1), on the other hand, sounds can be **short or long**, according to the rules in 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 below.

3.2.2 Stressed syllables - vowels

In stressed syllables the vowels are

a) **long** before one or no consonant

Examples:	*ˈtal*	[tʰa:l]	(„speech“)
	ˈtala	[tʰa:la]	(„speak“)
	ˈte	[tʰɛ:]	(„tea“)
	ˈtrúa	[tʰru:a]	(„believe“)

b) **short** before double-written (geminate) consonants and before consonant-clusters (other than those mentioned in c) below)

Examples:	*ˈkoss*	[kʰɔs:]	(„kiss“)
	ˈminni	[mɪn:ɪ]	(„smaller“)
	ˈefstur	[ɛfstʏr]	(„uppermost“)
	ˈanda	[anta]	(„breathe“)

c) **long** before two-consonant-clusters where the first consonant is written *p*, *t*, *k* or *s*, and the second consonant is written *v*, *j* or *r*

Examples:	*ˈakrar*	[a:krar]	(„fields“)
	ˈhetja	[hɛ:tja]	(„hero“)
	ˈtvisvar	[tʰvɪ:svar]	(„twice“)

NB II

From the rules of stress and length it is clear that in most cases long sounds can only occur in the first syllable of a word. But in words like

	ˈskólaˌstofa	(„classroom“)
and	*ˈdýfinǵaˌkennari*	(„diving-teacher“)

etc. (cf. 3.1) the second (weaker) stress is sufficient for getting long sounds in the third syllable: [skou:lastɔ:va] and in the fourth syllable: [ti:viŋkakⱼʰɛn:arɪ].

3.2.3 Stressed syllables — consonants

In stressed syllables the consonants are **usually short.**

Long consonants are only the double-written (geminate) *bb, dd, gg,* ([kⱼ:] or [k:]), *ff, ss, ll, mm, nn* and *rr.*

Examples:	ˈ*pabbi*	[pʰap:ɪ]	(„daddy")	ˈ*skúffa*	[skuf:a]	(„drawer")
	ˈ*oddur*	[ɔt:ʏr]	(„point")	ˈ*bassi*	[pas:ɪ]	(„bass")
	ˈ*Siggi*	[sɪkⱼ:ɪ]	(prop.n.)	ˈ*mamma*	[mam:a]	(„mummy")
	ˈ*Magga*	[mak:a]	(prop.n.)	ˈ*kerra*	[kⱼʰɛr:a]	(„cart")
	ˈ*ball*	[pal:]	(„dance")			
(— but	ˈ*hilla*	[hɪtla]	(„shelf") etc.,see 5.6.1)			
	ˈ*penni*	[pʰɛn:ɪ]	(„pen")			
(— but	ˈ*seinna*	[sɛitna]	(„later") etc., see 5.6.3).			

NB III

pp, tt, kk = hp, ht, hk

The double-written (geminate) *pp, tt,* and *kk* are not long stops. They are pronounced as an *h* + an unaspirated stop (this is the so-called „pre-aspiration", see 5.8).

Examples:	ˈ*happ*	[hahp]	(„luck")
	ˈ*gott*	[kɔht]	(„good" neutr.)
	ˈ*ekki*	[ɛhkⱼɪ]	(„not")
	ˈ*lokkur*	[lɔhkʏr]	(„curl")
	etc.		

3.2.4 Exercises

Exercise 15

vísa	[vi:sa]	*litur*	[lɪ:tʏr]	*hóta*	[hou:ta]
lýsti	[listɪ]	*binda*	[pɪnta]	*fólk*	[foul̥k]
kútur	[kʰu:tʏr]	*fela*	[fɛ:la]	*neita*	[nɛi:ta]
rúlla	[rul:a]	*ferð*	[fɛrð]	*reisn*	[rɛistn]
suður	[sʏ:ðʏr]	*göt*	[kö:t]	*gáta*	[kau:ta]
lund	[lʏnt]	*örn*	[örtn]	*hálka*	[haul̥ka]
goggur	[kɔk:ʏr]	*gata*	[ka:ta]	*færa*	[fai:ra]
sog	[sɔ:ɣ]	*rabba*	[rap:a]	*gæsla*	[kⱼaistla]
				rauður	[röy:ðʏr]
				auðn	[öyðn]

Exercise 16

a)	*fikra*	[fɪ:kra]	b)	*aðrir*	[aðrɪr]
	nepja	[nɛ:pja]		*velja*	[vɛlja]
	titra	[tʰɪ:tra]		*blaðra*	[plaðra]
	Esja	[ɛ:sja]		*selja*	[sɛlja]
	sautján	[söy:tjaun]		*semja*	[sɛmja]
	lepja	[lɛ:pja]		*Elvar*	[ɛlvar]
	vekja	[vɛ:kⱼa]		*hósta*	[housta]
	betri	[pɛ:trɪ]		*aftur*	[aftʏr]
	setjast	[sɛ:tjast]		*volgur*	[vɔlkʏr]

NB IV

Sentence-stress can interact

The rules given for stress and length in this chapter are designed as a description for single words. In sentences, however, at least in everyday speech, things can get a bit more complicated as some words may be left unstressed, which also means that all sounds in those words must be short. This depends on the individual's rhythm of speech and on the semantic importance of the words. This means, for instance, that the words *skórinn, er, gamall, og, slitinn,* are transcribed as follows when they are all stressed:

[skou:rɪn], [ɛ:r], [ka:matl], [ɔ:ɣ], [stlɪ:tɪn]

But in the following sentence, where sentence-stress takes effect, the words *er* and *og* are left unstressed, so that we get the following pronunciation:

Skórinn er gamall og slitinn („The shoe is old and worn-out")
[skou:rɪnɛr ka:matlɔ(ɣ) stlɪ:tɪn]

4. A brief look at a few sound alternations in connected everyday speech

4.1

4.1.1

Vowel is dropped

When a word ends in an **unstressed** vowel and is immediately followed by another word beginning with a vowel, the unstressed vowel is often dropped.

The vowel in question is shown in brackets in the exercise below.

Exercise 17

Ferð(u) ekk(i) á morgun? [fɛrðɛhk$_j$au mɔrkʏn]	(„You are leaving tomorrow, aren't you?“)
Látt(u) okkur vita [lauhtɔhkʏr vɪ:ta]	(„(Please) let us know“)
Hvort er heitar(a) út(i) eð(a) inni? [kʰvɔr̥tɛr hɛitar u:tɛð ɪn:ɪ]	(„Is it warmer inside or outside (the house)?“)
Ól(i) og Dodd(i) eru bræður [ou:lɔɣ tɔt:ɛrʏ prai:ðʏr]	(„Óli and Doddi are brothers“)
Sigg(i) er stærr(i) en Einar [sɪk$_j$:ɛr stair:ɛn ɛi:nar]	(„Siggi is taller than Einar“)
Ól(a) er sam(a) um allt nem(a) Ellu [ou:lɛr sa:mʏm al̥tnɛm ɛl:ʏ]	(„Óli doesn't care about anything but Ella“)

4.1.2

h is dropped

When the pronouns *hún* (*hana, henni, hennar*) and *hann* (*hann, honum, hans*) are **unstressed** in a sentence, they usually drop the initial *h*.

Example: *Kom (h)ann með (h)enni?* („Did he come with her?“)
[kʰɔ:man mɛ:ðɛnɪ]

Furthermore, as the h has been dropped, the preceding unstressed vowel is often dropped as well (according to 4.1.1).

Example: *Sýnd(u) (h)enni skón(a) (h)ans* („(Please) show her his shoes“)
[sintenɪ skou:nans]

Exercise 18

Pétur sýnd(i) (h)enni bílinn [pʰjɛ:tʏr sintenɪ pi:lɪn]	(„Pétur showed her the car“)
Hann er góður við (h)ana [han:ɛr kou:ðʏr vɪ:ðana]	(„He is kind to her“)
Hún óskað(i) (h)onum til hamingju [hu:n ouskaðɔnʏmtʰɪl ha:miɲk$_j$ʏ]	(„She congratulated him“)
Óli hélt að (h)ún færi heim [ou:lɪ j̊ɛl̥taðun fai:rɪ hɛi:m]	(„Óli thought that she would go home“)
Þú telur að hún sé greindar(i) en hann [þu: tʰɛ:lʏrað hunsjɛ krɛintarɛn han:]	(„You think that she is more clever than he is“)

NB I

Note that the initial *h* in *hann, hún* is only vulnerable to deletion when the pronouns are not stressed, i.e. the *h* is always kept in the beginning of a sentence and when for some reason stress is put on the pronoun in a sentence (e.g. to point out a contrast as in the last sentence in exercise 18).

4.1.3

þ becomes *ð*

When the pronouns beginning with a *þ*, that is *þú* (*þig, þér, þín*); *það* (*það, því, þess*); *þeir* (*þá, þeim, þeirra*); *þær*; *þau*; *þann, þeim* etc.; *þessi* etc.; *þetta* etc.; *þinn, þín, þitt* etc., are unstressed in a sentence, the initial *þ* often changes to an *ð* (i.e., becomes voiced).

Example: *Eru þeir gamlir?* („Are they old?“)
[ɛ:rʏðɛir kamlɪr]

This is also true for some adverbs, at least for *þar, þarna, þangað*.

Example: *Hann fer þangað á morgun* („He will go there tomorrow“)
[han: fɛrðauŋkaðau mɔrkʏn]

The ð generated this way can also be dropped, see 4.1.4.

Exercise 19

Sýndu þeim húsið [sintʏðɛim hu:sɪð]	(„(Please) show them the house“)
Hann sagð(i) að þú værir þar [han: saɣðaðu vai:rɪrðar]	(„He said that you were there“)
Langar þig í þetta? [lauŋkarðɪɣ i:ðehta]	(„Do you want this?“)
Hann kom þangað á þessum fallega bíl [haŋ: kʰɔmðauŋkað au:ðesʏm fatlɛɣa pi:l]	(„He came there in this beautiful car“)
Liggur þér á að fá þetta? [lɪk:ʏrðjɛr au:að fau:ðehta]	(„Are you in a hurry to get this?“)
Hvort viltu þennan hérn(a) eða þennan þarna? [kʰvɔr̥t vɪl̥tʏ þɛn:an j̊ɛtnɛða þɛn:an þatna]	(„Do you want this one or that one?“)

NB II

Note that the initial *þ* in the above mentioned pronouns and adverbs can only become *ð* when the words in question are unstressed, i.e. the *þ* is kept in the beginning of a sentence, and when for some reason special stress is put on the pronoun or adverb (as in, for instance, the last sentence in exercise 19).

4.1.4

ð is dropped

In everyday speech, ð is often pronounced unclearly or simply dropped. This happens mainly in two situations:

a) ð is word final

Example:	*Húsi(ð) mitt* [hu:sɪmɪht]	(„My house“)

b) ð is generated from a *þ*, see 4.1.3 above, (sometimes spelled *þ*, sometimes *ð*)

Examples:	*Lærðir(ð)u heima?* [lairðɪrʏ hɛi:ma]	(„Did you do your homework?“) (from *Lærðir þú heima?*)
	Sást(u) (þ)etta? [saustɛhta]	(„Did you see this?“)

Exercise 20

Hann fer a(ð) koma [han: fɛ:ra kʰɔ:ma]	(„He will come soon“)
Óli sendi blaði(ð) til útlanda [ou:lɪ sɛntɪ pla:ðɪtʰɪl u:tlanta]	(„Óli sent the newspaper abroad“)
Ég las (þ)etta bar(a) einu sinni [jɛ:ɣ la:sɛhtapar ɛi:nʏ sɪn:ɪ]	(„I read this only once“)
Mér sýndist (þ)a(ð) ver(a) í lagi [mjɛ:r sintɪsta vɛ:ri lai:jɪ]	(„It looked all right to me“)
Getur(ð)(u) ekki sé(ð) mig í friði? [kⱼɛ:tʏrɛhkⱼɪ sjɛ:mɪɣi frɪ:ðɪ]	(„Can't you leave me alone?“)

4.2 Some common phrases

Exercise 21

Góðan daginn [kou:ðan tai:jɪn]	(„Good morning/afternoon“)
Góðan dag [kou:ðan ta:ɣ]	(„Good morning/afternoon“)
Daginn [tai:jɪn]	(„Good morning/afternoon“)
Gott kvöld [kɔht kʰvölt]	(„Good evening“)
Góða nótt [kou:ða nouht]	(„Good night“)
Komdu sæll [kʰɔntʏ saitl]	(„How do you do“ (to a male))
Komdu sæl [kʰɔntʏ sai:l]	(„How do you do“ (to a female))
Verði þér að góðu [vɛrðjɛra kou:ðʏ] (cf. chapter 4.1)	(„I wish you good appetite“)
Takk [tʰahk]	(„Thanks“)

Takk fyrir [tʰahk fɪːrɪr]	(„Thanks“)
Takk fyrir mig [tʰahkfɪrɪr mɪːɣ]	(„Thanks for the meal“)
Hvað er klukkan? [kʰvaːðɛr kʰlʏhkan]	(„What time is it?“)
Klukkan er sjö [kʰlʏhkanɛr sjöː]	(„It's seven o'clock“)
Hvenær fer næsti strætó? [kʰvɛːnairfɛr naistɪ straiːtou]	(„When does the next bus leave?“)
Hann fer eftir fimm mínútur [hanː fɛːrɛhtɪr fɪmːinutʏr]	(„It will leave in five minutes“)
Hvað kostar þetta? [kʰvaː kʰɔstarɛhta]	(„How much does this cost?“)
Afsakið [afsakʲɪ(ð)] (cf. 4.1.4)	(„Excuse me“)
Fyrirgefðu [fɪːrɪkʲɛvðʏ]	(„I'm sorry“ (to one person))
Fyrirgefið þið [fɪːrɪkʲɛvɪðɪ] (cf. 4.1.3-4)	(„I'm sorry“ (to more than one person))
Allt í lagi [al̥ti laiːjɪ]	(„Okay“).
Jæja [jaiːja]	(„Well“)
Bless [plɛsː]	(„Good-bye“)
Vertu blessuð [vɛr̥tʏ plɛsːʏð]	(„Good-bye“(to a female))
Vertu blessaður [vɛr̥tʏ plɛsːaðʏr]	(„Good-bye“(to a male))
Sé þig á morgun [sjɛːðɪɣau mɔrkʏn]	(„See you tomorrow“)

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5. Various problems

5.1 Vowels before *ng* and *nk*

ing, ink = íng, ínk
yng, ynk = ýng, ýnk
ung, unk = úng, únk
ang, ank = áng, ánk
öng, önk = aung, aunk
eng, enk = eing, eink

The spelling of words like

syngja („sing“)
munkur („monk“)
banki („bank“)
söngur („song“)
drengur („boy“)
etc.

is a bit misleading.

Before ng and nk the pronunciation of the vowels *i/y*, *u*, *a*, *ö*, *e* is as follows:

ing, *ink* = [iŋk], [iŋ̊k]
yng, *ynk* = [iŋk], [iŋ̊k]
ung, *unk* = [uŋk], [uŋ̊k]
ang, *ank* = [auŋk], [auŋ̊k]
öng, *önk* = [öyŋk], [öyŋ̊k]
eng, *enk* = [ɛiŋk], [ɛiŋ̊k]

Exercise 22

fingur
syngja
þungur
vangi
söngur
drengur

minnka
dynkur
munkur
banki
blönk
þenkja

Exercise 23

Mangi sagði mér langa sögu
(„Mangi told me a long story“)
Það á enginn heima hér
(„Nobody lives here“)
Útlendingarnir komu hingað
(„The foreigners came here“)
Mig langar að fara þangað
(„I want to go there“)
Hún söng sönginn á röngum stað
(„She sang the song in a wrong place“)
Fanginn var lengi í einangrun
(„The prisoner was kept in isolation for a long time“)
Vegurinn var lengdur
(„The road was made longer“)

5.2 Palatalization: the sounds [k_j^h] and [k_j]

5.2.1

kj or gj = [k_j^h] or [k_j]

A) When words begin with *kj*, as in *kjöt*, *Kjartan* etc., it is pronounced [k_j^h].

Example: *kjósa* [k_j^hou:sa]

B) When words begin with *gj*, as in *gjósa*, *gjöf* etc., it is pronounced [k_j].

Example: *gjarna* [$k_j$artna]

C) When *kj* is written inside a word, as in *sækja*, *fylkja* etc., the *kj* is pronounced [k_j].

Example: *reykja* [rɛi:k_ja]

D) When *ngj*, *lgj* or *rgj* are written inside a word, as in *lengja*, *fylgja* etc., the *gj* is pronounced [k_j].

Example: *þyngja* [þiɲk_ja]

Exercise 24 A-D

A	B	C	D
kjöt	*gjósa*	*reykja*	*lengja*
Kjartan	*gjöf*	*sækja*	*þyngja*
kjósa	*gjarna*	*þenkja*	*fylgja*
kjaftur	*gjóla*	*fylkja*	*belgja*
kjarnorka	*gjá*	*merkja*	*ergja*

NB I

vowel + gj + vowel = vowel + [j] + vowel

E) When *gj* is written inside a word, between two vowels, as in *teygja*, *leigja* etc., it is pronounced as a [j]. Thus, for instance, there is no difference in pronunciation between

	heygja	[hɛi:ja]	(„bury“)
and	*heyja*	[hɛi:ja]	(gen.pl of *hey* „hey“)

Exercise 24 E

teygja
leigja
þegja
beygja
smeygja
sveigja

5.2.2

$$k \text{ or } g + \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{í} \\ \text{ý} \\ \text{i} \\ \text{y} \\ \text{e} \\ \text{ei} \\ \text{ey} \\ \text{æ} \end{array} \right\} = [k_j^h] \text{ or } [k_j]$$

A) When words begin with a *k* which is followed by *í, ý, i, y, e, ei, ey* or *æ*, as in *kíló, kæfa* etc., the *k* is pronounced [k$_j^h$].

Example: *kinn* [k$_j^h$ɪn:]

B) When words begin with a *ǵ* which is followed by *í, ý, i, y, e, ei, ey* or *æ*, as in *ǵýs, ǵil* etc., the *ǵ* is pronounced [k$_j$].

Example: *ǵeta* [k$_j$ɛ:ta]

C) When *k* is written inside a word, followed by *í, ý, i, y, e, ei, ey* or *æ*, as in *leki, skæri* etc., the *k* is pronounced [k$_j$].

Example: *þykir* [þɪ:k$_j$ɪr]

D) When *nǵ, mǵ, lǵ* or *rǵ* are written inside a word, followed by *í, ý, i, y, e, ei, ey* or *æ*, as in *lenǵi, tímǵist, helǵi, marǵir* etc., the *ǵ* is pronounced [k$_j$].

Example: *Birǵir* [pɪrk$_j$ɪr]

Exercise 25 A-D

A	B	C	D
kíló	*ǵýs*	*leki*	*lenǵi*
kýr	*ǵil*	*skæri*	*unǵir*
kinn	*ǵeta*	*þykir*	*helǵi*
keila	*ǵeyma*	*skeyti*	*Belǵía*
kæfa	*ǵæta*	*óskir*	*marǵir*

NB II

vowel + g + i = vowel + [j] + i

E) When *ǵ* is written inside a word, between two vowels, and the latter vowel is *i* (the vowels *í, ý, y, e, ei, ey* and *æ* do not occur in this position in non-compound words), the *ǵ* is pronounced as a [j].

Examples:	*stiǵi*	[sti:jɪ]
	speǵill	[spɛi:jɪtl]
	tuǵir	[t^{h}ʏi:jɪr]

Exercise 25 E

daǵinn
lyǵi
falleǵir
stiǵi
speǵill
tauǵin
löǵin
boǵi
tuǵir
veǵir

Note that *i/y, e, u, ö, a* and *o* are pronounced [i], [ɛi], [ʏi], [öy], [ai] and [ɔi], respectively, before *ǵi* [jɪ], see chapter 5.3.

5.2.3

Exercise 26

Kjartan leyndist í kjarrinu
(„Kjartan was hiding in the bushes")
Kýrnar ǵefa okkur mjólkina
(„The cows give us the milk")
Ég skemmti mér í ǵær
(„I had fun yesterday")
Egill tók skjöldinn
(„Egill took the shield")
Marǵir fóru í lauǵina
(„Many people went to the swimming-pool")
Siǵǵi kemur með ǵjöfina
(„Siggi will bring the present")
Hann lék keilu um helǵina
(„He played bowling last weekend")
Marǵir unǵir stúdentar leiǵja sér herberǵi
(„Many young students rent rooms for themselves")
Gunnar seǵir ekkert, bara þeǵir
(„Gunnar says nothing, only keeps silent")
Hallǵerður vildi ǵjalda honum kinnhestinn
(„Hallgerður wanted to pay him back for the blow")
Hún keypti líkjör í Ríkinu
(„She bought some liqueur in the wine- and liquor-store")
Óskir okkar munu rætast einhvern daǵinn
(„Some day our wishes will come true")

5.2.4

Velars and palatals can alternate

Given the rules detailed in 5.2.1-5.2.2 it is obvious that many words can have two alternating forms, with and without palatal sounds, depending on the different sounds that can occur in the inflectional endings.

Before front unrounded vowels and *æ* and before *j*, *k* and *g* are **palatals**, otherwise they are **velars.**

Thus, for instance, we can have weak masculine nom. sing. with palatals, but weak masculine acc., dat., gen. sing. with velars:

nom.	*leki* (pal)	*banki* (pal)	*hagi* (pal)
acc.	*leka* (vel)	*banka* (vel)	*haga* (vel)
dat.	*leka* (vel)	*banka* (vel)	*haga* (vel)
gen.	*leka* (vel)	*banka* (vel)	*haga* (vel)

Likewise,	we have	fem.nom.sing.	engin	(pal)
	but	fem.nom.pl.	engar	(vel);
	we have	neutr.nom.sing.def.	lakið	(pal)
	but	neutr.nom.sing.indef.	lak	(vel);
	we have	masc.nom.pl.	langir	(pal)
	but	fem.nom.pl.	langar	(vel);
	we have	3.pers.sing.pres.ind.	getur	(pal)
	but	3. pers. sing. past ind.	gat	(vel);
	etc., etc.			

Exercise 27

Ég kom um daginn en kem ekki í dag
(„I came the other day but I won't come today")
Þarna er vegurinn. Húsið stendur við veginn.
(„There is the road. The house is by the road")
Mér líkar vel við þig þótt mér líki ekki við hana.
(„I like you though I don't like her")
Það er lygi. Þú ert lygari.
(„It's a lie. You're a liar")
Þarna er banki. Sérðu bankann?
(„There is a bank there. Can you see the bank?")
Ég kaupi lauk. Ég keypti laukinn.
(„I'm buying an onion. I bought the onion")
Sástu veika drenginn? Veiki drengurinn er farinn.
(„Did you see the sick boy? The sick boy is gone")

5.3 Vowels before *gi*

igi = „ígi"
ygi = „ýgi"
egi = „eigi"
ugi = „uígi"
ögi = „augi"
agi = „ægi"
ogi = „oígi"

Before *gi* (pronounced [jɪ], cf. 5.2.2, NB II), the pronunciation of vowels is as follows:

a) *i, y, e, u, ö, a, o* **(the spelling is misleading):**

igi	[i:jɪ],	e.g.	stigi	[sti:jɪ]
ygi	[i:jɪ],	e.g.	lygi	[li:jɪ]
egi	[ɛi:jɪ],	e.g.	vegir	[vɛi:jɪr]
ugi	[ʏi:jɪ],	e.g.	tugir	[tʰʏi:jɪr]
ögi	[öy:jɪ],	e.g.	lögin	[löy:jɪn]
agi	[ai:jɪ],	e.g.	lagið	[lai:jɪð]
ogi	[ɔi:jɪ],	e.g.	bogið	[pɔi:jɪð]

b) **other vowels : according to spelling.**

Exercise 28

a)
stiginn
tiginn
lygi
flygill
vegir
fallegir
lögin
sögin
lagið
sagirnar
stíginn
gíginn
sígið
gýgi
leigir
beygir
laugin
taugin
hægir
nægir

b)
tugir
göfugir
bogið
logi
múgi
súginn
tógið
nógir
lágir
bágindi

NB III

Note that *iǵi, yǵi, eǵi, öǵi, aǵi* are pronounced exactly like *íǵi, ýǵi, eiǵi, auǵi, æǵi* (resp.). Therefore it often happens that different words are pronounced in exactly the same way.

Example:	lögin	[löy:jɪn]	(„the law"), pronounced exactly as
	laugin	[löy:jɪn]	(„the swimming-pool").

Exercise 29 — read first vertically, then horizontally —

stiginn	(„the staircase")	stíginn	(„the path" (acc.sing.))
segir	(„(he/she) says")	seigir	(„tough" (masc.nom.pl.))
lögin	(„the law")	laugin	(„the swimming-pool")
nagi	(„(he/she) gnaws" (subj.))	nægi	(„(it)is sufficient" (subj.))

5.4 The pronunciation of the letter *h*

As you have noticed, the letter *h* usually occurs only at the beginning of words.

h + vowel = [h] + vowel

Before vowels, h is simply pronounced [h], like in

hestur	[hɛstʏr]	(„horse"),
halda	[halta]	(„think"),
etc.		

(This initial [h] is often dropped in the pronouns *hann* and *hún*, see 4.1.2).

hv = [k^hv]

Before *v*, *h* is (by the majority of speakers, see the Appendix) pronounced as [k^h]:

Examples:	hvað	[k^hva:ð]	(„what")
	hvolpur	[k^hvɔl̥pʏr]	(„puppy")
	hvernig	[k^hvɛtnɪɣ]	(„how")

In *hj*, *hé*, *hl*, *hn*, *hr*, *h* has the effect of devoicing the following consonant (remember that *é* = [jɛ]), i.e.

hj = [j̊]
hé = [j̊ɛ]
hl = [l̥]
hn = [n̥]
hr = [r̥]

hj = [j̊]

Examples:	*hjól*	[j̊ou:l]	(„bicycle")
	hjálpa	[j̊aul̥pa]	(„help")
	hjúkrun	[j̊u:krʏn]	(„nursing")

hé = [j̊ɛ]

Examples:	*hér*	[j̊ɛ:r]	(„here")
	hélt	[j̊ɛl̥t]	(„thought" v.)
	hérað	[j̊ɛ:rað]	(„district")

hl = [l̥]

Examples:	*hlusta*	[l̥ʏsta]	(„listen")
	hlæja	[l̥ai:ja]	(„laugh")
	hlýða	[l̥i:ða]	(„obey")

hn = [n̥]

Examples:	*hnerra*	[n̥ɛr:a]	(„sneeze")
	hneta	[n̥ɛ:ta]	(„nut")
	hnútur	[n̥u:tʏr]	(„knot")

hr = [r̥]

Examples:	*hraði*	[r̥a:ðɪ]	(„speed")
	hræddur	[r̥ait:ʏr]	(„afraid")
	hringur	[r̥iŋkʏr]	(„circle")

Exercise 30

hvað
hvolpur
hvernig
hver
hvísla

hjól
hjálpa
hjúkrun
hjón
hjálmur

hér
hélt
hérað
héri
hérna

hlusta
hlæja
hlýða
hlaupa
hlýr

hnerra
hneta
hnútur
hnýta
hnáta

hraði
hræddur
hringur
hrós
hrista

Exercise 31

Nonni hnýtir hnútinn nógu vel
(„Nonni ties the knot well enough")
Rósa og Hreiðar eiga hrósið skilið
(„Rósa and Hreiðar deserve the praise")
Lára hlýtur að hlakka til afmælisins
(„Lára must be looking forward to her birthday")
Hérna er hérinn, held ég
(„Here's the hare, I think")
Hjálmar fékk hjól í jólagjöf
(„Hjálmar got a bicycle for Christmas")
Hvert ferð þú í kvöld?
(„Where are you going tonight?")

5.5 DEVOICING: Before written p, t, k all consonants are unvoiced

$$\underset{[-\text{voice}]}{\text{C}} \quad + \text{p, t, k}$$

As discussed in 2.2.3 (see also exercises 11, 12 and 14), we can look at nasals, laterals, trills and most fricatives as „pairs", consisting of one voiced and one unvoiced sound.

In Icelandic, before **written** *p, t, k* **only the unvoiced** part of each pair occurs (this stage has, however, not yet been reached in some areas in Northern Iceland, see the Appendix).

As this is **in most cases not shown in the spelling,** and as most of these unvoiced sounds do not exist in, e.g., English, German, Danish and French, and have therefore proved difficult for many students, we shall now look at some examples to clarify the results of the general rule mentioned above.

Sound	*Written*	*As in*			
[f]	„f",„p",„pp"	oft	[ɔft];	rífka	[rifka];
		æpti	[aiftɪ];	tepptur	[tʰɛftʏr];
[þ]	„ð"	iðka	[ɪþka];	blíðka	[pliþka];
[x]	„g",„gg",„k",„kk"	sagt	[saxt];	rakt	[raxt];
		byggt	[pɪxt];	krökkt	[kʰröxt];
[n̥]	„n",„nn"	vanta	[van̥ta];	fennti	[fɛn̥tɪ];
[ɲ̊]	„n",„nn"	banki	[pauɲ̊kjɪ];	minnki	[miɲ̊kjɪ];
[ŋ̊]	„n", „nn"	flinkur	[fliŋ̊kʏr];	minnka	[miŋ̊ka]
[m̥]	„m",„mm"	hempa	[hɛm̥pa];	skammta	[skam̥ta];
[l̥]	„l",„ll"	stelpa	[stɛl̥pa];	elta	[ɛl̥ta];
		fálki	[faul̥kjɪ];	gyllti	[kjɪl̥tɪ];
[r̥]	„r",„rr"	verpa	[vɛr̥pa];	varta	[var̥ta];
		orka	[ɔr̥ka];	þurrka	[þʏr̥ka]

NB IV

Note that the written *p, t, k* are always unaspirated after unvoiced sounds, i.e. pronounced as [p], [t], [kj], [k].

NB V

The value of the distinction between voiced and unvoiced sounds

Please note that it is **important to make a clear distinction** between the voiced and the unvoiced sounds. Otherwise, we either get nonsense-words or we take the risk of mixing up two different words, as, for instance,

	vanta	[van̥ta]	(„need")	and	*vanda*	[vanta]	(„do sth. well")
or	*orka*	[ɔr̥ka]	(„energy")	and	*orga*	[ɔrka]	(„shout").

NB VI

pt, ppt = [ft]
gt, ggt, kt, kkt = [xt]

Note that written *p, pp, g, gg, k, kk* are pronounced as fricatives, [f] and [x], in front of written *t*.

Examples:	*æpti*	[aiftɪ],	past tense of	*æpa*	(„scream“);
	steikti	[stɛixtɪ],	past tense of	*steikja*	(„fry“).

NB VII

bolti = **„bohlti“**
seinkun = **„seihnkun“**
verpa = **„vehrpa“**

If the unvoiced *l, n, r* before *p, t, k* are a problem for you, it might be a good idea to imagine them written as *hl, hn, hr*, respectively, cf. the first sounds in words like *hlusta, hneta, hraði* etc. in chapter 5.4. You could thus try to think of *bolti, stelpa, vanta, seinkun, orka, verpa* etc as *„bohlti“, „stehlpa“, „vahnta“, „seihnkun“, „ohrka“, „vehrpa“* etc. and see if the pronunciation gets easier that way.

Exercise 32

oft
aftur
æpti
gapti
teppti

blíðka
iðka
maðkur
Rauðka
blaðka

hægt
rakt
steikti
byggt
krökkt

lampi
hempa
svampur
skammta
pumpa

kantur
lenti
svunta
vanta
fennti

banki
Sveinki
minnki
bunki
hanki

banka
Sveinka
minnka
bunka
hanka

stúlka
piltur
silki
hvolpur
allt

merkja
orka
þurrka
sorp
svartur

Exercise 33

Hér er allt fullt af fólki
(„This place is crowded“)
Sveinka vantar lampa
(„Sveinki needs a lamp“)
Svarta úlpan týndist
(„The black parka was lost“)
Það er oft hægt að senda þetta beint
(„This can often be sent directly“)
Lambið og hvolpurinn drukku volga mjólkina
(„The lamb and the puppy drank the warm milk“)
Pilturinn glápti á stúlkuna
(„The boy gazed at the girl“)
Börkur synti í kaldri lauginni
(„Börkur swam in the cold swimming-pool“)

5.6 [tl]-insertion: the pronunciation of ll, rl, sl, nn, rn, sn

5.6.1

Rule: ll = [tl]

Written *ll* is in most cases pronounced as [tl]. This is the pronunciation of „original“ Icelandic words.

Examples:	*fullur*	[fʏtlʏr]	(„full“)
	hella	[hɛtla]	(„pour“)
	bolli	[pɔtlɪ]	(„cup“)

	Exception:	**ll = [l:] in**	
a)	**pet names,**	*Kalli*	**etc.**
b)	**loan-words,**	*mylla*	**etc.**

Written *ll* is in **two** cases pronounced as you would expect from the spelling, that is as [l:]:

a) in pet names, as in

Kalli	[$\mathrm{k^h}$al:ɪ]	(for *Karl*)
Júlli	[jul:ɪ]	(for *Júlíus*)

etc., see the appendix to 5.6.1.

b) in loan-words (i.e. words of foreign origin that have been taken into use in Icelandic), as in

mylla	[mɪl:a]	(„mill“)
ball	[pal:]	(„dance“ n.)
rall	[ral:]	(„rally“)

etc.

Exercise 34

a)

hilla
falla
illa
fúll
Páll
fullur
hella
bolli
fylla
halla
allir
sulla
malla
bulla
della
skalli

b) **(pet names and loan-words)**

Kalli
Júlli
rúlla
pilla
bolla
nellika
troll

Appendix to 5.6.1: List of pet names with ll = [l:]

Villi	for	*Vilhjálmur*
Alli		*Alfreð*
Kalli		*Karl*
Júlli		*Júlíus*
Elli		*Erlingur, Erlendur, Elías*
Palli		*Páll*
Gulli		*Guðlaugur, Gunnlaugur*
Halli		*Haraldur*
Ella		*Elín*
Gulla		*Guðlaug*
Silla		*Sigurlaug*
Alla		*Aðalheiður*
Solla		*Sólveig*
Vallý		*Valborg*
Malla		*Málfríður*
Kolla		*Kolbrún*

5.6.2

Rule: rl = [rtl]

Written *rl* is pronounced with an inserted [t].

Examples:	*perla*	[p^{h}ɛrtla]	(„pearl“)
	þyrla	[þɪrtla]	(„helicopter“)
	Karl	[k^{h}artl]	(prop.n.)

NB VIII

Option: rl = [tl]

varla
karl
kerling

The [r] of these [rtl]-clusters may be dropped (cf.2.2.3, NB XIV) in three very common words: *varla, karl, kerling*, leaving only [tl]. (Consequently *karl* („old man“) and *kall* („shout“), for instance, are pronounced exactly alike).

varla	[vatla]	(„hardly“)
karl	[k^{h}atl]	(„old man“)
kerling	[k$_{j}^{h}$ɛtliŋk]	(„old woman“)

Exercise 35

Karl
þyrla
Sturla
Erla
árla
perla

varla
karl
kerling

5.6.3

nn = [tn] or [n:]

Rule 1:

$$\left.\begin{matrix}\text{í}\\ \text{ý}\\ \text{é}\\ \text{á}\\ \text{ú}\\ \text{ó}\\ \text{æ}\\ \text{ei}\\ \text{ey}\\ \text{au}\end{matrix}\right\} + \text{nn} = \left\{\begin{matrix}\text{í}\\ \text{ý}\\ \text{é}\\ \text{á}\\ \text{ú}\\ \text{ó}\\ \text{æ}\\ \text{ei}\\ \text{ey}\\ \text{au}\end{matrix}\right\} + [\text{tn}]$$

Written *nn* is pronounced [tn] when it follows a letter which either

a) is written with a superscript mark: *í, ý, é, á, ú, ó,*
or
b) is one of the diphthongs *æ, ei, ey, au.*

Examples:	*brúnn*	[prutn]	(„brown“)
	seinna	[sɛitna]	(„later“)
	fínn	[fitn]	(„elegant“)
	grænn	[kraitn]	(„green“)

Rule 2:

$$\left.\begin{array}{c}\mathbf{i}\\ \mathbf{y}\\ \mathbf{e}\\ \mathbf{u}\\ \mathbf{\ddot{o}}\\ \mathbf{a}\\ \mathbf{o}\end{array}\right\} + \mathbf{nn} = \left\{\begin{array}{c}\mathbf{i}\\ \mathbf{y}\\ \mathbf{e}\\ \mathbf{u}\\ \mathbf{\ddot{o}}\\ \mathbf{a}\\ \mathbf{o}\end{array}\right\} + [\mathrm{n:}]$$

Written *nn* is pronounced the way you would expect from the spelling, i.e. without an inserted [t], if it follows a monophthong with no superscript mark: *i, y, e, u, ö, a,o.*

Examples:	*finna*	[fɪn:a]	(„find“)
	penni	[p^{h}ɛn:ɪ]	(„pen“)
	banna	[pan:a]	(„prohibit“)

NB IX

Exception: nn in def.art. = [n:]

In words like *trúnni* („the religion“ dat.sg.) where *nn* is a part of the definite article following a stem ending in a vowel (*trú*), the *nn* is always pronounced as [n:]. Further examples of this sort include

spánni	[spaun:ɪ]	(„the forecast“ dat.sg.)
eynni	[ɛin:ɪ]	(„the island“ dat.sg.)
klónni	[k^{h}loun:ɪ]	(„the claw“ dat.sg.)
frúnni	[frun:ɪ]	(„the housewife“ dat.sg.)
tánni	[t^{h}aun:ɪ]	(„the toe“ dat.sg.)

Exercise 36

brúnn
einn
grænn
fínn
Spánn
spónn
fleinn
fínn

spánni
eynni
klónni
tánni
frúnni
meynni
ánni
kúnni

finna
brenna
banna
penni
kanna
Nonni
tennur
sanna

5.6.4

Rule: rn = [rtn]

Written *rn* is pronounced with an inserted [t].

Examples:	*fornöld*	[fɔrtnölt]	(„ancient times“)
	súrna	[surtna]	(„get sour“)
	þerna	[þɛrtna]	(„maid-servant“)

NB X

Option: rn = [tn]

a) very common words, *þarna* **etc.;**
b) *n* **belongs to def.art.,** *afarnir* **etc.**

The [r] of the [rtn]-clusters mentioned is very often dropped (cf. 2.2.3, NB XIV) leaving thus only [tn], in

a) some very common words, including

Examples:	*þarna*	[þatna]	(„there“)
	hérna	[j̊ɛtna]	(„ here“)
	barn	[patn]	(„child“)
	ríkisstjórn	[ri:k$_{j}$ɪstjoutn]	(„government“)

b) those cases where the *n* of *rn* belongs to the definite article

Examples:			
	afarnir	[a:vatnɪr]	(„the grandfathers“)
	ömmurnar	[öm:ʏtnar]	(„the grandmothers“)
	skórnir	[skoutnɪr]	(„the shoes“)
	hæðirnar	[hai:ðɪtnar]	(„the hills“)

Exercise 37

rýrna
ferna
korn
fornöld
kjarni
þerna
sárna
hýrna

þarna
hérna
barn
ríkisstjórn
afarnir
ömmurnar
skórnir
hæðirnar

5.6.5

sl = [stl]
sn = [stn]

Written *sl* and *sn* is usually pronounced [stl] and [stn], respectively.

Exercise 38

snúa
snyrta
snöggur
asni
gisnir

slá
slíta
slátur
gæsla
Gísli

5.6.6

Exercise 39

Páll vill elta Erlu
　(„Páll wants to chase Erla“)
Alli (Alfreð) vinnur eins og allir aðrir
　(„Alli (Alfreð) works like everybody else“)
Bíllinn þinn er fínni en minn
　(„Your car is smarter than mine“)
Steinninn er varla þyngri en barnið
　(„The stone is hardly heavier than the child“)
Annan manninn finnst mér ég kannast við
　(„I think I recognize one of the two men“)
Nonni er þarna hjá ánni
　(„Nonni is there, by the river“)
Kerlingin ágirnist perluna
　(„The old woman desires the pearl“)
Sveinn ræddi við systurnar um fornöldina
　(„Sveinn discussed ancient times with the sisters“)
Bátarnir fengu full troll
　(„The (fishing)boats filled their trawls (with fish)“)
Allir mennirnir komu seinna til vinnu en venjulega
　(„All the men came to work later than usual“)
Mjólkin súrnaði í könnunni
　(„The milk got sour in the jug“)
Asninn sleit snúruna
　(„The donkey broke the rope“)
Gísli er snjall stjórnandi
　(„Gísli is a clever director“)

NB XI

When *ll*, *rl*, *nn* and *rn* are followed by *t* or *d*, there is no [t]-insertion.

Examples:					
	fylla („fill“)	[fɪtla]	but	*fyllti* („filled“)	[fɪl̥tɪ]
	villast („get lost“)	[vɪtlast]	but	*villtist* („got lost“)	[vɪl̥tɪst]
	tolla („stick“)	[tʰɔtla]	but	*tolldi* („stuck“)	[tʰɔltɪ]
	girnast („desire“)	[kⱼɪrtnast]	but	*girntist* („desired“)	[kⱼɪ(r̥)n̥tɪst]

and *girnd* [kʲɪ(r)nt] („desire“ n.)

When *ll,rl,nn* and *rn* are followed by *s*, the [t]-insertion is optional.

Examples:	*fall*	(„fall“ n.)	—	*falls*	[fals]	or [fatls]	(gen.)
	tröll	(„giant“)	—	*trölls*	[tʰröls]	or [tʰrötls]	(gen.)
	barn	(„child“)	—	*barns*	[par̥s]	or [part(n̥)s]	(gen.)

(In *alls* [als] (of *allur*), however, there is never [t]-insertion).

Exercise 40

Húsið var alltaf fullt af alls konar fólki
(„The house was always crowded with all kinds of people“)
Hún vildi ekki villast en villtist samt
(„She didn't want to get lost but got lost nevertheless“)
Árni er bróðir Karls og Björns
(„Árni is the brother of Karl and Björn“)
Sumt tolldi en annað vildi ekki tolla
(„Some of it stuck but the rest wouldn't“)

5.7 The pronunciation of *fl* and *fn*

Rule: **fl** = [pl]

fn = [pn]

When *fl* and *fn* follow a vowel they are pronounced [pl] and [pn], respectively.

Examples:	*afla*	[apla]	(„gain“)
	jafn	[japn]	(„even“ adj.)
	heflar	[hɛplar]	(pl. of *hefill* „plane“)
	dofnir	[tɔpnɪr]	(pl. of *dofinn* „numb“)
	tafls	[tʰapls]	(gen. of *tafl* „chess“)
	ofns	[ɔp(n̥)s]	(gen. of *ofn* „oven“)

Exception: **fld, flt** = [lt], [l̥t]
fnd, fnt = [mt], [n̥t]

When *fl, fn* are followed by a *d* or a *t*, the *f* is dropped (cf. 2.2.3, NB XIV). Moreover, the *n* of *fnd, fnt* changes to an *m*.

Examples:	*efldi*	[ɛltɪ]	(„reinforced“)
	eflt	[ɛl̥t]	(„(has) reinforced“)
	nefnd	[nɛmt]	(„committee“)
	nefnt	[nɛm̥t]	(„(has) mentioned“)

NB XII

rfl = **rl** **[rtl]**
rfn = **rn** **[rtn]**

When an *r* precedes *fl* or *fn* the *f* is dropped (cf. 2.2.3, NB XIV), leaving behind the clusters *rl, rn,* pronounced [rtl] and [rtn], respectively (see 5.6.2 and 5.6.4).

Examples:	*hvarfla*	[kʰvartla]	(„flutter“)
	þarfnast	[þartnast]	(„need“)

Exercise 41

afla
jafn
heflar
dofnir
tafls
ofns

efldi
eflt
tefldi
nefnd
hefnd
nefnt

bókasafn
sofna
rifna
hvarfla
þarfnast
hvirflar

Exercise 42

Ég þoldi ekki hvað hann tefldi illa
(„I couldn't bear how badly he played chess“)
Nefndin aflaði gagna um bókasafnið
(„The committee collected some information about the library“)
Hrafn þarfnast hvíldar
(„Hrafn needs some rest“)
Allir eru jafnir en sumir eru jafnari en aðrir
(„Everyone is equal but some are more equal than others“)

5.8 Preaspiration: the pronunciation of *pp, tt, kk; pl, tl, kl; pn, tn, kn.*

Between vowels and double-written *pp, tt, kk* or vowels and *p, t, k* + *l, n* there is inserted an *h*. This [h] is called **preaspiration.**

Examples: **(Vowel+)**

pp	=	[hp]	*uppi*	[ʏhpɪ]	(„upstairs“)
tt	=	[ht]	*rotta*	[rɔhta]	(„rat“)
kk	=	[hkj]	*ekki*	[ɛhkjɪ]	(„not“)
		[hk]	*lokkur*	[lɔhkʏr]	(„curl“)
pl	=	[hpl]	*epli*	[ɛhplɪ]	(„apple“)
tl	=	[htl]	*fatlaður*	[fahtlaðʏr]	(„handicapped“)
kl	=	[hkl]	*miklir*	[mɪhklɪr]	(„great“masc.nom.pl.)
pn	=	[hpn]	*opna*	[ɔhpna]	(„open“)
tn	=	[htn]	*vatn*	[vahtn]	(„water“)
kn	=	[hkn]	*sakna*	[sahkna]	(„miss“)

This [h] inside a word has proved difficult for many foreign students to pronounce correctly. Therefore, three notes on preaspiration are necessary.

Note 1: The [h]-sound of preaspiration is (normally) **a clear, ordinary *h*-sound,** like the *h* of *hestur*, etc.

Note 2: Many people tend to mix the preaspiration [h] up with the sound [x] (the German **ach**-sound). This is incorrect.

Sometimes after the vowels *í, ý* [i], *ei, ey* [ɛi] and *æ* [ai], preaspiration can become similar to the sound [j̊] (like in *hjá* etc.).

Examples:

víkka	[vihka]	or	[vij̊ka]	(„broaden“)
breikka	[prɛihka]	or	[prɛij̊ka]	(„broaden“)
ætla	[aihtla]	or	[aij̊tla]	(„intend“)

Note 3: A good start (if preaspiration is a problem) is to imagine false boundaries between the [h]-sound on the one hand and the stop on the other. This division gives us an [h] at the **end** of the first „part“, and it is easier to produce an [h] at the end than in the middle of a word.

Examples:
tappi = „tah-bi“
hitta = „hih-da“
hnakki = „hnah-gi“
sökkva = „söh-gva“
tipla = „tih-bla“
vitlaus = „vih-dlaus“
Hekla = „heh-gla“
heppni = „heh-bni“
hitna = „hih-dna“
vökna = „vöh-gna“
etc.

NB XIII

Recall that *kkt* and *ppt* are pronounced [xt] and [ft], respectively (cf. 5.5, NB VI).

Exercise 43

koppur = „koh-bur“
sippa = „sih-ba“
settist = „seh-dist“
pottur = „poh-dur“
lakkið = „lah-gið“
þakkir = „þah-gir“
sokkar = „soh-gar“
flakkari = „flah-gari“
litlir = „lih-dlir“
dökkna = „döh-gna“
hitna = „hih-dna“

Exercise 44

tappi
heppni
uppi
seppi
kappi
hattur
rotta
batt
hitta
fatta
bakki
stykki
Frikki
bekkir
ekki
takk
sökkva
dökkna
þykkur
víkka

kaplar
epli
tipla
opna
skepna
fitla
fatlaður
ætla
vatn
blotna
Hekla
miklir
lyklar
vakna
læknir

Exercise 45

Nokkrir pottar brotnuðu
(„A few pots were broken“)
Læknirinn vill ekki fitna
(„The doctor doesn’t want to grow fat“)
Frikki settist á bekkinn
(„Frikki took a seat on the bench“)
Ég svitna við of mikla áreynslu
(„I sweat from too much strain“)
Hann fattar ekki tæknina
(„He doesn’t grasp the technique“)
Það hefur stækkað, þykknað, víkkað og breikkað
(„It has grown bigger, thicker, wider and broader“)
Hún er í þykkri skikkju
(„She’s wearing a thick cloak“)
Mig vantar sokka og fingravettlinga
(„I need socks and gloves“)

Exercise 46

Etna og Hekla eru eldfjöll
(„Etna and Hekla are volcanoes“)
Siggi litli ætlar að verða læknir
(„Little Siggi is going to be a doctor“)
Gotterí er slæmt fyrir meltinguna
(„Sweets are bad for the digestion“)
Líklega er betra að fara fljótlega (cf. 5.11)
(„It’s probably better to leave soon“)
Þetta er tómt bull
(„This is just nonsense“)
Hlýr fatnaður er nauðsynlegur hér
(„Warm clothing is necessary here“)
Það er ekkert nýtt í fréttum
(„There is nothing new“)

5.9 On the letter *g* inside words

Medially and word-finally the pronunciation of *g* is rather varying. Therefore, we shall now look at the main rules that govern the distribution of the variants.

After consonants, *g* is pronounced [k] or [kj], according to the rules given in 5.2.

After vowels, we can have [k], [ɣ], [x], [j] or, finally, a *g* can be dropped.

The situation is as follows:

A) **g + l, n = [k] + l, n**

Examples:	*logn*	[lɔkn]	(„calm“ n.)
	sigla	[sɪkla]	(„sail“ v.)

B) **g + a, u, ð, r = [ɣ] + a, u, ð, r**
and **-g (word-final) = [ɣ]**

Examples:	*saga*	[sa:ɣa]	(„story“)
	dagur	[ta:ɣʏr]	(„day“)
	sagði	[saɣðɪ]	(„said“)
	sigra	[sɪɣra]	(„defeat“)
	lag	[la:ɣ]	(„song“)

C) **g + t, s = [x] + t,s**

Examples:	*sagt*	[saxt]	(„said“ p.part.)
	dags	[taxs]	(„day“ gen.)

D) **g + j, i = [j] + (j), i**

Examples:	*beygja*	[pɛi:ja]	(„bend“)
	logi	[lɔi:jɪ]	(„flame“)

E) **ó, á, ú + g + a, u = ó, á, ú + a,u**

Examples:	*lóga*	[lou:a]	(„kill (an animal)“)
	mágur	[mau:ʏr]	(„brother-in-law“)
	múgur	[mu:ʏr]	(„crowd“)

Exercise 47

logn
sigla
beygla
rigning
tálga
tíglar
syngja
egna

fagur
fagrir
saga
lag
sig
sagði
beygði
fægði

hægt
sigti
dags
lagsi
slugsa
sagt
beygt
fægt

bogi
hagi
logi
leigja
segir
segja
beygja
fægja

lóga
mágur
múgur
tágar
bjúga
fljúga
nógur
lágur

NB XIV

It follows from the rules mentioned above that we can have **alternating forms of the same stem.**

Examples:	*segja*	[sɛi:ja]	(„say“ inf.)
	sagði	[saɣðɪ]	(„said“ past t.)
	sagt	[saxt]	(„said“ p.part.)
	saga	[sa:ɣa]	(„story“)
	sagna	[sakna]	(„stories’“ (gen.pl.))

Exercise 48

draga — *dregið* — *dregnir*
lag — *lagið* — *lagsins*
dagur — *deginum* — *dagsins*
sögurnar — *sagnanna*
segja — *segir* — *sagði* — *sagt*
stíga — *stigið*
stígurinn — *stíginn* — *stígnum* — *stígsins*

Exercise 49

Laugi hugsaði um Rögnu það sem eftir var dagsins
(„Laugi thought about Ragna for the rest of the day“)
Englendingar fögnuðu sigrinum
(„The English rejoiced in the victory“)
Það er skemmtilegt að sigla í logni og fallegu veðri
(„It’s fun to sail in calm and beautiful weather“)

Bíllinn beygði hægt
(„The car turned slowly“)
Bogi er mágur Sigurðar
(„Bogi is Sigurður’s brother-in-law“)

5.10 *r*-exercises

For those who have a problem with the trill-*r*, here is an exercise.

Exercise 50

renna
rífa
róta
ræða
rakur

hraður
hraustur
hrós
hrista
hrinda

fara
vera
Þóra
Ari
búr

farðu
Varði
borga
byrja
Margrét

hart
mark
syrpa
þorp
varta

verri
færri
marra
hærra
Sirra

Exercise 51

Rúnar ræddi við Rósu
(„Rúnar talked to Rósa“)
Hún rembdist eins og rjúpan við staurinn (phrase)
(„She strove hard“)
Vertu óhræddur
(„Don’t be afraid“)
Hrólfur fékk ekki rönd við reist (phrase)
(„Hrólfur couldn’t resist it“)
Birkir sparkaði tuðrunni hærra
(„Birkir kicked the ball up higher“)

5.11 On compound words

In compound words, the rules of pronunciation are sometimes interrupted by the boundaries between the various parts that a word can be made up of. This means that for those who are not fully acquainted with the lexicon, spelling may sometimes be misleading.

It is impossible to discuss this problem in detail here, but we shall now mention some fairly typical examples.

Rule interrupted	*Examples*		
Length	*háskóli* *Ísland*	(há+skóli) (ís+land)	[hau:skoulɪ] [i:stlant]
Vowel changes before ng, nk	*vangá* *vankunnátta*	(van+gá) (van+kunnátta)	[vaŋkau] [vaŋkʰʏnauhta]
Devoicing	*máltaka* *samkennari*	(mál+taka) (sam+kennari)	[maultʰaka] [samkⱼʰɛnarɪ]
t-insertion	*vínneysla* *bíllyklar*	(vín+neysla) (bíl+lyklar)	[vin:ɛistla] [pil:ɪhklar]
fl, fn = [pl], [pn]	*hóflega* *hafnet*	(hóf+lega) (haf+net)	[houvlɛɣa] [havnɛt]
Preaspiration	*útlendingur* *reykkafari*	(út+lendingur) (reyk+kafari)	[u:tlɛntiŋkʏr] [rɛi:kʰavarɪ]
Palatalization	*leikendur* *fiskiðnaður*	(leik+endur) (fisk+iðnaður)	[lɛi:kɛntʏr] [fɪskɪðnaðʏr]
Pronunciation of g	*hagnýta* *ógaman*	(hag+nýta) (ó+gaman)	[haɣnita] [ou:kaman]

6. Exercises and survey of problems

6.1 A few separate words

Exercise 52

banna	[pan:a]	(„prohibit")
miði	[mɪ:ðɪ]	(„ticket")
sofa	[sɔ:va]	(„sleep" v.)
hestur	[hɛstʏr]	(„horse")
fiskur	[fɪskʏr]	(„fish")
vinna	[vɪn:a]	(„work")
læra	[lai:ra]	(„learn")
borða	[pɔrða]	(„eat")
dansa	[tansa]	(„dance" v.)
taka	[tʰa:ka]	(„take")
gata	[ka:ta]	(„street")
ljós	[ljou:s]	(„light" n.)
bílar	[pi:lar]	(„cars")
bíó	[pi:ou]	(„cinema")
kaffi	[kʰaf:ɪ]	(„coffee")
háskóli	[hau:skoulɪ]	(„university")
stúdentar	[stu:tɛn̥tar]	(„students")
bók	[pou:k]	(„book")
íslenska	[i:stlɛnska]	(„Icelandic")
málver	[maulvɛr]	(„language laboratory")
Margrét	[markrjɛt]	
Ásta	[austa]	
Ari	[a:rɪ]	
Þóra	[þou:ra]	
Örn	[örtn]	

6.2 Survey of problems

Exercise 53

líst	[list]	(cf. 2.1.2)
list	[lɪst]	
lest	[lɛst]	

fundur	[fʏntʏr]	
lönd	[lönt]	
haust	[höyst]	

keyrsla	[kⱼʰɛi(r̥)stla]	
lægst	[laixst]	

lambið	[lampɪð]	(cf. 2.2.2)
aldur	[altʏr]	
ólga	[oulka]	

kinn	[kⱼʰɪn:]	(cf. 2.2.2 and 5.2)
kenna	[kⱼʰɛn:a]	
geit	[kⱼɛi:t]	
gær	[kⱼai:r]	

dagur	[ta:ɣʏr]	(cf. 2.2.2 and 5.9)
lagði	[laɣðɪ]	
flögra	[flöɣra]	

eða	[ɛ:ða]	(cf. 2.2.2)
tuðra	[tʰʏðra]	

íþrótt	[i:þrouht]	(cf. 2.2.3 and 5.5)
hjón	[j̊ou:n]	
sagt	[saxt]	
samt	[sam̥t]	
benti	[pɛn̥tɪ]	
banki	[pauɲ̊kⱼɪ]	
tankur	[tʰauŋ̊kʏr]	
belti	[pɛl̥tɪ]	
verpa	[vɛr̥pa]	

betri	[pɛ:trɪ]	(cf. 3.2.2)
tvisvar	[tʰvɪ:svar]	

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happ	[hahp]	(cf. 3.2.3 and 5.8)
gott	[kɔht]	
ekki	[ɛhkⱼɪ]	
lokkur	[lɔhkʏr]	
vatn	[vahtn]	
epli	[ɛhplɪ]	

Pétur sýnd(i) (h)enni bílinn (cf. 4.1.1 and 4.1.2)
[pʰjɛ:tʏr sintɛnɪ pi:lɪn]

Sást(u) (þ)etta ? (cf. 4.1.3 and 4.1.4)
[saustɛhta]

vangi	[vauɲkⱼɪ]	(cf. 2.1.1 and 5.1)
drengur	[treiŋkʏr]	

bogi	[pɔi:jɪ]	(cf. 2.1.1, 5.3 and 5.9)
lagið	[lai:jɪð]	

hvað	[kʰva:ð]	(cf. 2.2.1 and 5.4)
hjón	[j̊ou:n]	
hér	[j̊ɛ:r]	
hnútur	[n̥u:tʏr]	
hlusta	[l̥ʏsta]	
hratt	[r̥aht]	
sulla	[sʏtla]	(cf. 5.6)
kollur	[kʰɔtlʏr]	
Villi	[vɪl:ɪ]	
mylla	[mɪl:a]	
árla	[aurtla]	
varla	[vatla]	
beinn	[pɛitn]	
penni	[pʰɛn:ɪ]	
þerna	[þɛrtna]	
þarna	[þatna]	

efla	[ɛpla]	(cf. 5.7)
jafn	[japn]	

segja	[sɛi:ja]	(cf. 5.9)
segir	[sɛi:jɪr]	
sagði	[saɣðɪ]	
sagt	[saxt]	
saga	[sa:ɣa]	

sagna	[sakna]	
bjúga	[pju:a]	
verra	[vɛr:a]	(cf. 5.10)
marra	[mar:a]	
háskóli	[hau:skoulɪ]	(cf. 5.11)
vankunnátta	[vaŋkʰʏnauhta]	
fokillur	[fɔ:kitlʏr]	
samtök	[samtʰök]	
varlega	[varlɛɣa]	
hóflega	[houvlɛɣa]	
útlendingar	[u:tlɛntiŋkar]	
hagnýta	[haɣnita]	
óguðlegur	[ou:kvʏðlɛɣʏr]	

6.3 Short texts

Exercise 54

Bannið hundahald

Ég er að furða mig á því að hundar hlaupa lausir um borgina og valda oft miklum hávaða. Ég stunda næturvaktir og nágrannahundurinn geltir allan daginn og varnar mér svefni. Ég er þegar búinn að kæra þetta á skrifstofu borgarinnar en ekkert heyrt um það síðan. Það er ekki að sjá að reglur borgarstjóra um hundahald séu nokkuð til bóta fyrir þá sem ekki er um hunda gefið. Mér er meinilla við hunda og maður veit aldrei hvenær þeir kunna að bíta. Sjálfur hef ég lent tvisvar sinnum í því. Það ætti að mínu mati að banna hundahald að nýju skilyrðislaust og því fyrr því betra.

Lesandi

(*Þjóðviljinn*, 4. september 1985)

Exercise 55

Ár frá síðasta Kröflugosi

„Ástandið er eins og verið hefur í langan tíma, mjög rólegt“, sagði Páll Einarsson jarðeðlisfræðingur hjá Raunvísindastofnun Háskólans er Morgunblaðið spurði hann tíðinda frá Kröflu í tilefni þess að nú er ár liðið frá síðasta gosi þar.

„Það er afskaplega erfitt að spá um framhaldið. Þarna er engin vakt lengur en síritandi mælitæki skrá alla hreyfingu. Um er að ræða jarðskjálfta-, halla- og sprungumæla. Þessi tæki sýna nokkurn veginn hvað er um að vera í jarðskorpunni hverju sinni, en þau segja lítið um það sem koma skal. Til að það sé hægt þarf að túlka það sem mælitækin skrá.

Við vitum að þrýstingurinn í kvikuholunni er hár, hærri en hann hefur verið fyrir sum af þeim gosum sem komið hafa. Þessi þrýstingur nægir til þess að koma kviku upp á yfirborðið og væri því ekki undarlegt þó að þarna yrði gos. Hinsvegar fer þessi þrýstingur ekki vaxandi. Hann hefur haldist stöðugur síðan um síðustu áramót. Mjög erfitt er að spá út frá þessu um framhaldið ef litið er til lengri tíma. En ef þarna yrði gos er líklegt að við gætum spáð fyrir um það með stuttum fyrirvara“, sagði Páll Einarsson að lokum.

(*Morgunblaðið*, 4. september 1985)

Exercise 56

„Konan er dýrmæt. Karlar eru lítils virði af því að konan fæðir af sér fólkið í landinu. Hvað getur karlmaður gert? Kona elur barn, síðan tekur hún haka, fer út á akurinn og vinnur þar. Hún fæðir barnið með afrakstri vinnu sinnar. Karlmaður kaupir bara pálmaolíu. Karlmenn byggja aðeins hús“.

Þetta var haft eftir konu af Tíkar-ættbálki í Kamerún á 5. áratugnum þegar hún var spurð um það hvers vegna konur væru syrgðar í 4 daga en karlar væru syrgðir aðeins í þrjá daga.

(*Vera*, málgagn kvenfrelsisbaráttu, 2 / 1985, bls. 13)

Appendix

Dialectal differences

In this booklet we focus on the pronunciation of the language of Reykjavík and neighbouring areas. This is the language used by the majority of speakers, and can **under no circumstances** cause misunderstanding when talking to people from other parts of the country. In fact, differences in „dialect“ are so small in Icelandic that some people even hesitate to use the word „dialect“ at all.

The differences that, however, do occur, are mostly restricted to the phonetic or phonological level. I shall now mention the **three main features** where you notice deviation from the language we use in this course.

1) Harðmæli („hard language“)

This means that instead of **common** [p], [t], [kⱼ], [k] in

api	[a:pɪ]
gata	[ka:ta]
lykill	[lɪ:kⱼɪtl]
aka	[a:ka]
betri	[pɛ:trɪ]
etc.	

(i.e. when *p, t, k* are non-initial), **harðmæli has** [pʰ], [tʰ], [kⱼʰ], [kʰ]:

api	[a:pʰɪ]
gata	[ka:tʰa]
lykill	[lɪ:kⱼʰɪtl]
aka	[a:kʰa]
betri	[pɛ:tʰrɪ]
etc.	

(except when these sounds appear after unvoiced sounds, as in *orka* [ɔr̥ka] etc.).

Harðmæli is assumed to be common in Northern Iceland, in the areas between Skagafjörður and Vopnafjörður (both included).

2) Raddaður framburður („voiced pronunciation“)

This means that instead of **common unvoiced** *l, m, n, ð* ([l̥], [m̥], [n̥], [þ]) **before** *p, t, k* (that consequently are pronounced as unaspirated, as always after unvoiced sounds) in

hjálpa	[j̊aul̥pa]	
heimta	[hɛim̥ta]	
vanta	[van̥ta]	
banki	[pauɲ̊kⱼɪ]	
maðkur	[maþkʏr]	etc.,

raddaður framburður has **voiced** *l, m, n, ð* before *p, t, k* (and *p, t, k* are aspirated, [pʰ], [tʰ], [kⱼʰ], [kʰ]):

hjálpa	[j̊aulpʰa]	
heimta	[hɛimtʰa]	
vanta	[vantʰa]	
banki	[pauɲkⱼʰɪ]	
maðkur	[maðkʰʏr]	etc.

Raddaður framburður is used by many people in Northern Iceland, but is somewhat less widespread than the previously mentioned **harðmæli**. The central areas of **raddaður framburður** are Eyjafjörður and Þingeyjarsýsla.

3) Hv-framburður („hv-pronunciation“)

This means that instead of **common** [kʰv] **for written** *hv* in

hvað	[kʰva:ð]	
hver	[kʰvɛ:r]	
hvolpur	[kʰvɔl̥pʏr]	etc.,

hv-framburður has [xʷ] **or** [xv] **or** [x]:

hvað	[xʷa:ð]	or	[xva:ð]	or	[xa:ð]	
hver	[xʷɛ:r]	or	[xvɛ:r]	or	[xɛ:r]	
hvolpur	[xʷɔl̥pʏr]	or	[xvɔl̥pʏr]	or	[xɔl̥pʏr]	etc.

Hv-framburður is restricted to Southern and South-Eastern Iceland, i.e. the areas between Árnessýsla and Suður-Múlasýsla (both included).

It may be added here that these three dialect features are by many Icelanders considered to be „better“ or „clearer“ variants of pronunciation than their correlatives in the Reykjavík language. Therefore, these features sometimes occur even in the speech of individuals that come from areas other than those mentioned above, especially in rather formal speech or when reading aloud. This is especially the case for **harðmæli**.